

JW, JP

9/29/31

Mr. Ben Gilbert
WETA-TV Channel 26
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Gilbert,

It is with a sense of loss other than Vic Maerki and presumably others of your news staff feel that I read Judith Martin's story in today's Post. I will feel no loss if "Newsroom" disappears. In my view it failed and, unless changed considerably, serves less purpose than its cost justifies. From what I have seen - and experienced - it has not been what the people should be able to expect of "public" TV. Thus, to me, no loss.

Except the (for me) considerable expense I have gone to so that I could receive it in this fringe area in which we live.

When newsmen go to public TV and carry with them all the shibboleths and cliches of commercial journalism they make of "public" TV news coverage but an indistinct copy of what is available. Only the commercials are missing. Long ago I stopped looking at your news because it never once, to my viewing, presented what could not be presented on other newscasts. This is what the functioning of any representative society requires - not repetition of what is presented elsewhere but the significant news that is not. If you did it, you did not do it when I was looking.

Within my own experience, you censor the news, and that is even more intolerable for "public" TV (although it recently condemned press self-censorship). Beginning in February or March I started phoning about mine, the only book to present other than the official mythology about the "ing assassination. I got one stall after another, and the reporter to whom I was referred never phone me and never returned any of, as I now recall, three calls I made to her. I won a Freedom-of-Information Act lawsuit against Justice, and that was not news. I got a summary judgement against the same Department (how many have you reported?) and that, too, was not news. The book details this and the suppressed evidence it yielded. But of course, how could that be news? It charges and proves illegalities and violations of the canon of the bar (with no single complaint from any of those charged). News to "public" TV? Of course not! That is why nobody took the time - or considered "wasting" a minute - ever to speak to me about it.

But should we expect more of "public" TV when it alone was at the scene of the crime and reported nothing? How much more enterprising, how much more necessary, can "public" TV be? It doesn't even own the pictures its man took!

My book is now dead. There is nothing you can do that will be of any benefit to me personally, and I ask nothing of you, not personally. But I do ask that the false pretense of "public" TV "news" be abandoned. I'd like very much for your show to be continued. But not unless it can give me news I can't get elsewhere. Unless it does it serves no purpose and the money should be spent in other ways.

Sincerest regrets,

Harold Weisberg